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Psychedelic mushroom interest grows in Utah center opening in Provo



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PROVO, Utah — Psilocybin, or the hallucinogenic substance found in specific mushrooms, is making headlines as more states look to decriminalize it for therapeutic purposes.

While attempts to legalize psilocybin failed in Utah earlier this year, interest in the substance's possible mental health benefits is currently growing and showing up in different ways along the Wasatch Front.

In recent months, a mushroom treatment center, called [Singularity](#), opened its doors in the City of Provo.

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“Being a Utahn myself, and from Provo, I think this is the right place at the right time,” said founder Bridger Lee Jensen.

Jensen has worked in the mental health field for 20 years and found psilocybin six years ago to help people in what he calls a sincere and safe way. He plans to continue that effort in his new space.

“The process needs to include preparation and proper screening,” he explained. “People aren’t just going to come in and suddenly be able to do this. This isn’t just a place to do that. It’s a place where people are working on bettering our lives and progressing spiritually.”

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He said psychotherapy will also be used to help them process their guided experience or “trip”.

“When you get to the point where you’ve had these experiences, and you’ve seen hundreds of people benefit and heal from it. The scary thought is not doing this,” he said.

This isn’t Jensen’s first attempt to bring psilocybin to the Beehive State either. He was part of a [grassroots movement earlier this year](#) that urged state lawmakers to pass legislation

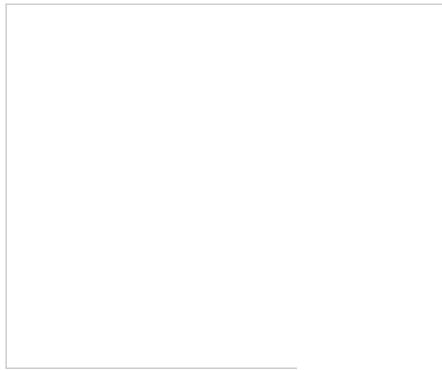
permitting the legal use of psilocybin for clinical and academic purposes.

While he presented a petition showing public support for its passage, those efforts fizzled when [Governor Spencer Cox announced he wouldn't support a bill legalizing magic mushrooms.](#)

"It's just not there yet. We got there with medical marijuana. I just don't believe the science is there. I don't believe we should be experimenting on 5,000 people here in our state. And, I think there are some serious consequences and side effects, societally as well as medically that I am just not comfortable with," said Cox during his monthly news conference on PBS back in February.

According to the U.S. Government, psilocybin is also a Schedule I substance under the Controlled Substances Act (CSA), which means it has great potential for abuse and serves no legitimate medical purpose.

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Also, the [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#) reports there's no scientific agreement on the risks of using psilocybin.

Despite that, [several national universities](#) have shown its positive effect on people with mental health disorders through their research including Huntsman Cancer Institute's Palliative Care Physician Anna Beck, MD.

Beck worked with other medical experts to publish a study that examines the effectiveness of psilocybin-assisted group therapy in cancer patients with depression.

"At least 50 percent of our small group of patients had a significant reduction in their depressive symptoms. In fact, it actually went into remission by week number two."

While they were only able to accommodate 12 people through this trial, Beck says they didn't struggle to find public interest or support for the study.

Beck hopes the findings help them fund larger studies in the future and explore the substance further.

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"I think that these are very powerful medications and very powerful drugs and I think their uses could be. I don't think we could understand all of their uses at this point," she explains.

Just this year, the [FDA came out with new draft considerations for designing clinical trials for psychedelic drugs.](#)

FOX 13 News reached out to the City of Provo about how the mushroom treatment center is allowed to operate legally, and a spokesperson issued the following statement:

"Psilocybin is a Schedule I controlled substance and under Utah law, it is illegal to possess or distribute. A recent effort to legalize psilocybin was not approved by the legislature, therefore use and distribution continue to be criminal offenses.

We have evaluated recent claims that use is protected under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and we believe those claims to be without merit. The position of the Provo Police Department is that officers will treat psilocybin as an illegal drug and will arrest or cite users and distributors and refer charges to the Utah County Attorney's Office. We have confirmed with that office that they intend to prosecute violators."

FOX 13 News reached out to the Utah County Attorney's office for further clarification on Provo's aforementioned "position". They responded:

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"Based upon research conducted by the Utah County Attorney's office, it does not appear that Singularism has Constitutional protections to either use or administer psilocybin."

Meanwhile, Bridger, who founded Singularism, says they're protected by the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of the U.S. Constitution.

Bridger sent the following updated statement to FOX 13 News:

"Singularism's attorney, Tanner Bean, states that Singularism has taken every effort to accord with state and federal constitutional and statutory religious freedom authorities which would permit its religious practices. Singularism is prepared to defend its religious freedom to, as a small religious minority group, partake of its religious rites and sacraments in a closed, supervised, and secure setting."

"Bridger and his team also report a pleasant meeting with the state attorney general's office requesting support for forthcoming legislation and clarification of Utah's religious freedom exemption protections."

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